

Bald Eagles of Shasta, Trinity, & Lewiston Lakes

Shasta & Trinity Units • Whiskeytown - Shasta-Trinity National Recreation Area

Shasta-Trinity National Forest



Bald Eagle Facts

Scientific Name: *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*

The American Bald Eagle is a large raptor with a broad wingspan, robust body, large head and a long, hooked beak. Adult bald eagles have a characteristic white head and tail with a dark brown body; and their beak and feet are bright yellow. Although the plumage coloration is the same for both sexes, females are generally 25 percent larger than males. Juveniles are often mistaken for Golden Eagles because until reaching sexual maturity at about four or five years of age their head and tail feathers remain dark brown in color. Adult bald eagles on average weigh approximately 12 pounds, standing around 3 feet tall with a wingspan of 7 feet. The eagle's eye sight is thought to be at least four times that of a human with perfect vision and is capable of seeing its prey from nearly a mile away. In the wild bald eagles live to around 20 years of age on average.

Breeding

Bald eagles are often monogamous and mate for life, tending to only replace a partner if its companion should die. Locally reproduction generally takes place from late December to early March with the incubation period lasting approximately 35 days. Eagles lay from one to three eggs with both the male and female sharing incubation duties. The eggs then hatch in the order they were laid. Chicks are born with grayish down feathers and partially open eyes. They are completely defenseless and rely on their parents to defend them from would-be predators and to provide them with food. The larger chick may out-compete others for food delivered by a parent or to directly kill its siblings, often resulting in only one chick surviving. The young eagles attempt their first flight at around 3 months of age but often continue to stay around the nest for four or five more weeks until they are able to successfully obtain food on their own. Adult eagles of the Shasta-Trinity National Forest tend to remain in their nesting territory year around and continue to use and maintain their nesting site year after year. On the other hand juvenile eagles migrate in the fall following seasonal food supplies.

Nesting

Locally bald eagles build their nests in tall coniferous trees but have been known to build ground nests in other locations. Ponderosa pine, Sugar pine and Douglas fir are tree species commonly used by eagles in the Shasta-Trinity National Forest. The selected tree is often the tallest tree of the stand which provides easy flight access and good visibility. Unlike osprey, which build nests atop dead trees, bald eagles tend to construct their nests in live trees near the trunk and just below the crown providing both protection from adverse weather conditions and shade from the sun. The nests are bowl-like in shape and on average five feet in diameter, four feet in height and several hundred pounds in weight.



Diet

Eagles are opportunistic feeders, taking a variety of prey consisting mainly of fish, waterfowl and small mammals. Locally, fish caught live and also as carrion, make up the majority of the eagle's diet. Bald eagles are known to steal food from other bald eagles as well as other raptors. They are commonly seen chasing osprey in attempts to steal its catch. Once an eagle obtains its prey, it uses its strong talons to hold down the prey while tearing the flesh apart with its sharp beak.



United States
Department of
Agriculture



Forest Service
Pacific Southwest Region
www.fs.usda.gov/r5

Shasta-Trinity National Forest
www.fs.usda.gov/stnf

Revised: 2-20



Threats to Bald Eagles

Several variables may be responsible for hindering the increase of bald eagle populations. These variables mainly result from human activities involving urban encroachment leading to habitat loss, contaminants and pollution from agricultural practices, and overconsumption of natural resources, especially water. Some natural processes also have negative effects for instance drought, fire, food availability, and species competition.

Forest Service and the American Bald Eagle

For over 100 years the Forest Service has been aiding in the protection and conservation of the bald eagle. Wildlife biologists of the Shasta-Trinity National Recreation Area have been diligently working in efforts to protect bald eagle populations and their habitats. These efforts are implemented not only through direct methods such as monitoring and habitat restoration projects, but also environmental awareness and educational programs. Currently the Shasta and Trinity Units support at least 45 pairs of resident eagles; 30 pairs at Shasta Lake, 12 pairs at Trinity Lake and 3 pairs at Lewiston Lake. This constitutes close to 20% of nesting bald eagles in California. Although this appears to be a large portion of the states nesting pairs, there is still work to be done.

The Forest Service invites the public to visit the Shasta-Trinity National Forest for an opportunity to see and enjoy the thriving populations of bald eagles in the National Recreation Area. Bird watchers are advised to carry binoculars and stay a fair distance away from eagles in order to avoid startling them. Even when eagles appear next to populated areas, they are still very wary of humans and all efforts should be made to not disturb them. Also keep in mind that the Bald Eagle Protection Act makes it illegal for anyone to collect eagles or eagle parts, nests, or eggs without a permit. You can help protect our national symbol by obeying posted signs and notifying the Forest Service of any action which may harm the eagles or their habitat.

Cool Facts

- Bald eagles construct the largest nest of any bird in North America. A nest found in Florida was measured at 20 feet deep, 9 1/2 feet wide, and weighed almost three tons.
- Bald eagles can soar to an altitude of over 10,000 feet.
- Eagle bones are light because they are hollow.
- Bald eagles have approximately 7,000 feathers.
- Bald eagles do not sweat. Like dogs, they control their temperature by panting with their mouths open.
- Bald eagles can “swim.” After catching prey that is too heavy to fly off with, they will swim to the shore, dragging they prey with them.
- Bald eagles have lived up to 50 years in captivity.

For more information, contact the US Forest Service:

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14225 Holiday Road
Redding, CA 96003
530-275-1587 (voice)
711 (TTY)

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